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Statement submitted by Russian Academy of Natural Sciences and Utah China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hands Development and Commerce, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Mountain women and mountain targets have to be in the focus of 2030 Development Agenda

The delegation of Utah Valley University to the 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women would like to thank the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences and Utah China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hands Development and Commerce for allowing us to contribute to the priority theme of this year's forum: social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. These issues are crucial for sustainable development of communities, families, women and girls in mountain areas.

At this forum last year, we emphasized that mountain women and families are among the poorest and most disadvantaged worldwide and at extreme risk of neglect by the international community. A study, "Mapping the vulnerability of mountain peoples to food insecurity," done by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations jointly with the Mountain Partnership Secretariat, a coordinator of sustainable mountain development agenda globally, found out that 39 per cent of developing countries' mountain populations, including women — 50 per cent in rural areas — is vulnerable to food insecurity, and that during 2000–2012, 30 per cent more mountain people suffered from food insecurity. Climate change, lack of access to education and jobs, and political turmoil to name a few further place mountain communities and women in dire circumstances.

The United Nations designated three mountain targets as an important tool for implementing the 2030 Development Agenda in mountain areas: Target 6.6: by 2020, protect and restore water related ecosystems, including mountains; Target 15.1: by 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular, mountains and drylands; Target 15.4: by 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development.

By participating at two United Nations forums on implementing different Sustainable Development Goals during 2018, members of the Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University, found out a lack of reliable mechanisms that would integrate mountain targets into those forums' final documents. This further marginalized the mountain communities globally and disenfranchised their right for sustainable development

During the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women, they co-hosted, through the engaged learning initiative, a side event, "Advocating for rural and mountain women globally through student engaged learning;" a parallel event, "Education for sustainable development to empower rural and mountain women," and advocated for mountain women through the written statement sponsored by a group of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. In addition, they were able to integrate multiple times language about mountain women in the Working Draft of recommendations from non-governmental organizations to Zero Draft Document of the Commission. Unfortunately, proposed language has been removed from the final document during the negotiations by state representatives. They did it in a non-transparent way during closed sessions, which demonstrated a marginal role of civil society in decision-making at the United Nations and, as a result, the neglect of the mountain targets as part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Similarly, during the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018, Utah Valley University students advocated for the implementation of mountain targets as an important step to bring mountain communities in the focus of the 2030 Development agenda. They did that by making an oral statement during general debates and through the written statement and thus contributed to the efforts of the Mountain Partnership, which co-hosted with the Government of Andorra a side-event titled "Mountains and the 2030 Agenda." The forum provided an important opportunity for them and other civil society groups and member states to do so because six Sustainabie Development Goals under its review contained three mountain targets. At the same time, none out of the 47 nations submitting Voluntary National Reviews at the forum, including the 14 states - members of the Mountain Partnership, mentioned mountain targets in their official statements. As a result, the Ministerial declaration of the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development, never mentioned the mountain targets at all.

The student engaged learning model of Utah Valley University has proven its success for students' professional growth, international recognition and for the advocacy of mountain women and sustainable mountain development agenda of the United Nations since 2011. Academic institutions elsewhere could provide similar benefits for their students by adopting it. However, their contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda cannot be successful if they will not be able to bring real changes to the mountain communities, families, women and girls worldwide.

We would like to urge the United Nations to make changes in the process of reviewing implementation of Sustainable Development Goals by member states during relevant forums of the Economic and Social Council. It needs to have an oversight mechanism ensuring that implementation of all targets affiliated with goals under considerations are included in the Voluntary National Reviews and in the final documents. In addition, the process of adoption of final documents of the forums has to be transparent, allowing for civil society and all interested parties to watch debates of the member states' representatives on that matter.

This needs to be done urgently, in order to improve the procedure of review of Sustainable Development Goals' implementation by nation states and make them a part of the 2019 forums of the Economic and Social Council. This will ensure then also that this forum will include in its final document a proper language about social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and empowerment — in particular of mountain women, girls, their families and communities.